DRASNIN PRODUCTIONS, INC.
180 East 79th Street
New York, New York 10021
(212) 988-2409

October 13, 1986

Dear Ruth:

Enclosed is the three-page essay you requested. I've opted for a more general piece about the documentary and its importance, rather than on documentary production -- which I assume will be a subject of frequent discussion. In any case, I hope this is suitable. Warm regards.

Sincerely,

Irv Drasnin

The documentary has a long and glorious, and sometimes inglorious, history. It has been used by filmmakers, by journalists, by social scientists, by propagandists, by governments. At times, their purposes have overlapped, making definitions difficult.

The non-fiction film has taken many forms: the travelogue, the instructional film, the promotional film, films of advocacy, the coverage of people and events. It has been a source of enlightenment, of distortion, of conscience, and of controversy.

The documentary <u>can</u> be controversial, especially because it is presumed to be non-fiction, truthful -- a reflection of reality, showing what we and our world are like. And, because honest men and women can have different perceptions of reality, there can be passionate disagreement over how it is depicted and interpreted.

At times, the documentary has succeeded in being

a revealing and accurate portrayal of a subject. Often, it occupies a gray area of partial truths, limited by its own conventions and possibilities. Nevertheless, the documentary form has been one of the more powerful instruments of communication in this century.

The first motion pictures were documentaries, glimpses of everyday life: workers in a factory, a train station, a mother feeding a baby; small pieces of reality, unedited, using real people and events. They were also the first indication of film's potential, the ability to let us see things, even familiar things, in a new or different way; or, as one writer has put it -- "to open our eyes to worlds available to us but for one reason or another, not perceived."

As the documentary's vision expanded to social and political questions perception itself often became an issue -- affected not only by what the filmmaker brought to a particular subject but by what was

brought to it by the audience. Reality is not always welcome. It is not necessarily, not always, that the facts or events of a documentary are untrue but that they are unwelcome. Much has been said and written about the point of view of the documentary-maker, but little attention has been paid to the prejudices and bias of those who watch documentaries, regardless of the facts.

Perhaps one reason the documentary has been so important and has so often inspired controversy is that the moving picture, and sound, skillfully recorded and edited, provides not only information but an experience -- involves us intimately, emotionally, in ways that the printed word alone cannot. And, in many parts of the world, through television, it can reach more people more immediately, and personally, than any printed version of a subject.

The documentary provides a subjective reality at the same time it is assumed to be presenting an objective reality. In that dual role, perhaps, is the source of its influence -- and of the heavy responsibility it imposes on those who would make and use them, whatever their purpose.

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December 30, 1986

Dear Ruth:

My "return" has been delayed by a terrible cold and by both the demands and inertia of the season. However, here are at least some initial reactions to the questions you've raised about the India trip.

1. It would help, I think, to provide more background, more context for understanding television in America. The opening session, I believe, should explain how American television (public and private) is organized, how it operates, its relationship to government, to the public, i.e. its place and role in U.S. society. I suspect we're assuming too much knowledge and understanding of all this.

Along the same lines, it's possible we also take too much for granted in our use of terminology, acronyms, professional short-hand etc. I think greater care can be taken in making clear what we're talking about -- both descriptively and in terms of purpose.

2. The same need for context, background and clarity applies to what we are showing and discussing: what each piece of programming is, what it represents, how it fits into the program of which it is a part and into the overall program we are presenting; its purpose, how it was produced, and why; and why, exactly, it is part of the festival.

I think we should also try to provide as many production details as possible in terms of technology, technique and personnel used in the production of any one of these programs (including production schedules, costs etc.). If I understand our purpose correctly, process is at least as important as content -- and consciously incorporating this into the presentation

could help move the festival from a "review" of the programs being seen to an emphasis on the "workshop" aspects we all seemed to be seeking.

3. It follows, then, that I don't think "technology" should open the program. For one thing, it seems to me that most of the technology being demonstrated is either not used or not needed in most of the programming being shown. For another, it represents in good part what most Indian producers do not have and may not have in the immediate (or even foreseeable) future; that, in turn, could serve as an excuse or deterrent to the development of programming possibilities in India. We might have said (over and over again, in my case) that technology isn't the key but I'm not sure it came across that way. It's important to understand technological developments and possibilities for the future -- and perhaps that should end rather than open the program. But it would be unfortunate if technology was construed to be the basis for what we do, or don't do, in American television programming; or worse, for what Indians can or can't do in their own programming and productions.

4. I heard you say that much less programming was shown this time yet I felt it was too much, at the expense of discussion, analysis and understanding. I also felt an overlapping, if not a redundancy, of some of the material. I think the categories might be more sharply defined, both in and of themselves and in relation to one another.

5. The audiences were responsive, I think. But I also think that 5-6 hour sessions are too long. I suggest a 4½-hour limit: two 2-hour sessions around a half-hour break. I would also encourage the submission of questions in writing during the course of the first three days. These could be used to provide information and to stimulate discussion during the summary meeting. (I agree that separate sessions for "special interests" is not an answer but I am intrigued by the possibilities of a "news-documentary" workshop along the lines of the

NPR science program in Bangalore.)

6. I'd also encourage consideration of how to show some of the programs in their entirety -- one of the questions frequently asked of me. Other questions that came up with great frequency: the relationship of producers/programmers to government, censorship, how subjects are selected, production costs, production schedules.

In general, that's probably a "short list" of reactions to the festival but something to throw into your mix. Please let me know if you'd like to discuss it further -- and when I can expect to be treated to a sushi lunch. In the meantime, I loved the memento of Mutton Street and all of my very best for the new year.

Warm regards,

Irv Drasnin

PS: I've tried to reach the station to ask about my videocassettes but without success. I'm concerned that either they haven't been returned or, if they were sent, didn't arrive. Either way, they're not here, and I anxiously await word and/or delivery. Many thanks.

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New York, New York 10021
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October 26, 1986

Dear Ruth:

Here's a rundown of the pieces I suggest for the documentary reel -- which would follow the pieces you're using from last year. I've indicated about ten seconds of black between last year's pieces and mine, in case I want to comment. I've indicated a similar break between the excerpts from the two China films and the last two -- come to think about it, perhaps there should also be a three second break between each of the pieces so it's a clear that we're moving from one film to another (but you probably have all that figured out already).

I've timed these excerpts with a stop watch while viewing a VHS recording -- so they may not be absolutely accurate. Please let me know if there are any questions or problems. Thanks.

All my best.

Irv Drasnin

PS: Since these are my only copies of these cassettes, I'd appreciate them back just as soon as possible.

1. About 10 seconds of black following the first two pieces you've selected.

2. Misunderstanding China.

   Take it from first picture at beginning of film; the first narration you will hear is:

   "No tickee, no washee. One from column A and one from Column B ... "

   Out Cue at about 17:00:

   Steve McQueen: "What happened? What the hell happened?" Gunshots. (Please take through the end of the scene, after gunshots.)

3. Looking for Mao.

   Pick-up at about 2:18, after the Frontline logo, tease and introduction, with the beginning of the film (after Savitch turns to monitor).

   First narration is: "A November morning in Peking at the monument to revolutionary heroes ..."

   1st Out-cue at about 12:02 is narration ending: "...whose dreams include a new direction for the revolution."

   2nd pick-up is on orchestra conductor at about 22:57, with narration: "Mao said revolution was not a dinner party ..."

   2nd Out-cue: at about 26:50, on conductor at end of Brahms symphony -- sequence ends on him after he's finished conducting.

4. About ten seconds of black.

5. You and the Commercial.

Pick-up from beginning of film, which is a montage of commercials. Narration begins: "Wait a minute, don't turn it off ... "

Out-cue: excerpts of soup and macaroni commercials following narration: "...to sell a 25-cent can of soup."

(Please note: I don't know how long this sequence runs because I don't have a VHS of it and couldn't time it -- but it's probably somewhere between 13-16 minutes.)

6. Hollywood Dreams.

Pick-up at about 2:12, after Frontline logo, tease and intro, from beginning of film. Narration begins: "A water tower overlooking a cemetery ..."

Out-cue at about 16:32, on song "Hooray for Hollywood"but before narration comes in again. The last piece of narration you should have in this select is: "...but we've done our job to the best of our ability if we get it made."

south carolina
educational television

drawer L
2712 millwood avenue
columbia, south carolina 29250

19 January 1987

Ted Tanen
American Executive Director
Indo-U.S. Subcommission on Education
and Culture
280 Madison Avenue, Suite 1202
New York, NY 11016

Dear Ted:

According to Sunday's NYTimes, bankruptcy is imminent for our favorite airline. Aren't you grateful you returned safely and weren't stranded somewhere en route by Chapter 11?

Before the holidays, I sent a memo to my American Video Festival in India colleagues, asking them to comment on the Festival in four areas. A copy of that memo and their responses are enclosed. Also enclosed are my recommendations for the March program. As you will note, we differ in our criticism of certain aspects of the event and ways in which they might be remedied. In making the recommendations, I took both into consideration, incorporating almost all of them.

Although several telex messages confirmed the return of the Festival in March with four day presentations in each of three cities--Bombay, Hyderabad and Madras, I still have a number of questions. Most perplexing is the request from the sponsors of the Festival to offer for preview only programs produced on video. Many of the fine programs offered in almost all categories were produced on film and later transferred to videotape for broadcast. Are they to be excluded? Whether produced on film or video, procedures and techniques remain pretty much the same.

I have received additional correspondence from Elizabeth Thornhill, USIA, about the Pakistan invitation/request. I'll bring it with me tomorrow, along with comments from Mr. Cauthen. Do you think the American Video Festival in India will have as long a run in Southeast Asia as The King and I had on Broadway?

Your letter of December 22 was an especially nice way to close out 1986! If the Festival was a success, it was due to the work of many others, especially the support from you, Sheila, Elise and my team of gentlemanly "machos"! Thanks for the kind words. I look forward to seeing you on Wednesday, January 21 at about 3:30 p.m., after arriving at Newark on time--2:09 p.m.--I hope!

Warm regards,

Ruth

Ruth Christensen Sproat
Director for Higher Education
and
American Coordinator,
American Video Festival in India

cc: Henry Cauthen
Tom Angell
John Bullington
Irv Drasnin
Benjamin Dunlap

AMERICAN VIDEO FESTIVAL IN INDIA

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MARCH 1987 PRESENTATIONS
19 JANUARY 1987

In making the following recommendations for the March 1987 appearance of the American Video Festival in India, the comments and suggestions of the American team, based on their experiences with the November-December 1986 Festival, were considered.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Festival Format: Inasmuch as the sponsors have endorsed the format used to date, the Festival will remain essentially the same--four days each in three cities (Bombay, Hyderabad and Madras) for six hours/day for three days, with the fourth day devoted to a symposium. The following changes to the content of the Festival should result in a more meaningful and strengthened presentation:

* Replace program excerpts that were less well-received with new video material more closely identifed with Indian needs --social issues(AIDS, drugs, planned parenthood), agriculture, health, history, news, and community programs. Program excerpts to be deleted would include a few of the higher education telecourses, the science and medicine sections and some of the performing arts. News and public affairs programming will be completely restructured. Television technology and documentaries will remain essentially the same.

* In addition to the equipment used last year, we will need an additional tv monitor and playback unit to allow for independent screening of complete programs by the audience. If additional equipment is unavailable, screening could take place prior to the start of the formal sessions. Team members could alternate on a rotating schedule according to audience demand.

* A total of 12 hours of video turned out to be too much for last year's presentation; if possible we will try to hold the formal excerpt presentations to 9-10 hours of video.

* The catalogue format will remain the same, with the exception of the addition of the following information:

  1. An appendix showing the structure of television broadcasting in the U.S. and a brief statement describing the relationship of television networks to the government, sources of funding, regulations, national and local programming concerns, etc.

  2. An appendix of various production elements: schedule, script, budget, etc. (These items could also be handed out if they cannot be conveniently included in the catalogue.

* Print materials--viewer's guides for PBS programs, study material for educational programs and promotional items (brochures and posters)-will be taken along to hand out to audiences.

By: Ruth Sproat
American Coordinator
American Video Festival in India

ANGELL

Interface

Interface Video Systems Inc.
Suite LL 200, 1333 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
(Tel.) 202-861-0500

January 2, 1987

Ruth Sproate
South Carolina Educational Television
drawer L
2712 Millwood Avenue
Columbia, South Carolina 29250

Dear Ruth,

Please excuse my tardiness in responding to your letter of December 12th, however, the press of business combined with the holidays has kept me quite busy.

Perhaps I was also influenced by the lack of anything new to say on the topic, lacking the perspective that only time could supply. Having exhausted that excuse (if in fact that's what it was) please find below my responses to your queries.

1. Audience response, as always, was marked by involvement, strong interest, and possibly a good bit of bewilderment. As you know, our audiences covered a wide spectrum from rank amateur to sophisticated pro and there is no way that you can ever structure a speech that can successfully meet the expectations of all.

2. The strength of the Festival is that we are there, that we are showing an interest and that the presentors by and large are a gregarious lot, open and willing to share their experience with whomever shows up. The weakness seems to revolve around what can possibly be accomplised in such a short time or more generally what is the point of the whole exercise? As you know, I feel that you've done an excellent job of picking up the AFI thing and carrying on. It now belongs to you and you have the opportunity or obligation to make it be whatever you want it to be.

3. My only consideration concerning restructuring would be to facilitate a more constructive use of the presentor's time. Out

of every site visited (i.e. 4-5 days out of my life) I only put in 2-3 hrs. worth of speech and another 1 of question and answer. That ratio, it seems to me, needs to be radically improved. How, I do not know.

4. Questions most often asked of me dealt with specific how-to-stuff surrounding technical matter I had shown. Of course, I also have received several letters upon my return asking for technical advice.

My major concern is that I have very little to contribute and am therefore questioning whether it is all-together appropiate for me to return in March. I, of course, will go if you feel it helpful but would like to limit my trip to 7 to 8 days, since March is shaping up as a critical month around here.

Please note that I've also included a bean bag to replace the one left in Bombay. Also, please find Niel Postman's book. The chapter on educational t.v. is especially interesting reading.

If there is anything else I can do, please don't hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Tom Angell

DRASNIN

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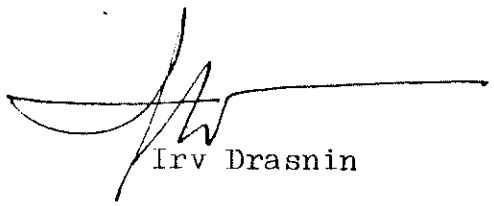
Warm regards,



Irv Drasnin

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BULLINGTON

south carolina
educational television

WNSC-TV 30
p.o. 11766
highway 21 bypass
rock hill, south carolina 29730

11 December 1986

Ms. Ruth C. Sproat
South Carolina ETV Network
2712 Millwood Avenue
Columbia, S.C.

Dear Ruth,

Two purposes to this letter: a thank you and a report with suggestions.

First, my deepest appreciation for the opportunity to be a part of this effort. And even deeper thanks for your constant patience and guidance during the mission.

Second, here are some impressions and suggestions:

1. It was difficult to balance the presentation on news so that it would "entertain" the non-television people and yet supply the television producers with working knowledge to improve their skills. This I think is partially due to the choices I made in program segments and the lack of a variety of material.

2. I think the idea of "showings", previews for general audiences and separate intensified workshops for producers would really help in the area of news. These need to be structured well and Doordarshan should assign people for the workshop sessions if they are serious about skills upgrades. We can be a lot of help to their people if they can help to get them off the subject of government controlled television and onto the business at hand...producing programs.

3. I found we had to play too much of the role of diplomat in dealing with questions about government control of news. This is an internal political issue that they must solve themselves. I think it puts us in an uneasy situation to be asked questions that lead to judgements on the validity of their system. Not being part of the diplomatic corps or knowing the political milieu, we are at a distinct disadvantage in this area. Let's leave diplomacy to the consulate.

4. I think the area of other local programming needs to be presented next time 'round. There is a lot going on here that may be of help.

5. I think programming for children needs to be strengthened-this is a weak area for Doordarshan.

6. Before the next team prepares, they need more complete information--program descriptions of productions at the local Kendras. This was a distinct disadvantage for me in preparing materials.

7. In the area of news/public affairs, we need to get a wider variety of programming. This can only be done if notification is done early enough. We need to show programs from all across the country from all time periods.

8. I think we need to produce a short-5 to 8 minute video on American television and the viewer. This sounds like a good job for Irv Drasnin if he will be willing to give into video for the sake of cost and time.

9. We really need to get a handle on who the audiences will be while preparing the showings.

10. Overall, if we can alter the image from a video "show" to a American video workshop it will be much more productive. Again, I think the delineation between training and entertainment should be sharply drawn. It would be o.k. to put together a couple of "evenings of the best of American television" for pure cultural exchange. But these should not be confused with the learning experience of workshop sessions.

Again, thank you, Mr. Cauthen and Bob Frierson for this once in a lifetime experience. Enclosed is a copy of letter to Sheila Crespi which she requested in a recent letter to me.

Best regards,

John Bullington